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Matthew Lau: Canada's woke emperor has no clothes

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Matthew Lau

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Matthew Lau: Justin Trudeau is a vain prime minister who presents himself as an enlightened feminist, noble climate activist, advocate for Indigenous progress, and committed servant of social justice. PHOTO BY GEOFF ROBINS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES FILES

In Hans Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes*, the vain emperor was told that his extravagant new suit would be invisible to anyone stupid or incompetent. All the high officials and people of the land, including the emperor himself, could not see the suit but, not wanting to appear stupid, they all pretended that the emperor was splendidly outfitted as he paraded through the city in his "new clothes" — that is, until a little child pointed out that, in fact, the emperor was wearing nothing.

In Canada today, there is a vain prime minister who presents himself as an enlightened feminist, noble climate activist, advocate for Indigenous progress, and so committed a servant of social justice that even the public health measures that closed Parliament could not stop him from kneeling in solidarity at a crowded Black Lives Matter protest. Many Canadians, not wanting to appear stupid or, worse, intolerant, have agreed to pretend that the prime minister is splendidly cloaked in virtue. The reality, however, has become increasingly difficult to ignore. The fact is that Canada's woke emperor has no clothes.



At the start of the current election campaign, in an attempt to burnish his feminist credentials, Justin Trudeau vowed to turn the country's supposed "she-cession" into a "she-covery." But the evidence does not support claims of a "she-cession," and it is plain to all with eyes to see that men as well as women suffered immensely from the pandemic and lockdowns. So the "she-covery" line, typical of the first two weeks of Trudeau's flagging campaign, did not land well.



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Contrast this to when Trudeau first became prime minister and appointed a gender-balanced cabinet. He was questioned by a reporter about his decision to appoint cabinet ministers based on their gender, and in demonstration of his ability to read a calendar and come up with fantastic non-sequiturs, he informed the reporter that the year was 2015. His reply for some reason drew widespread praise and admiration. But that was six years ago and much has happened since to tarnish his reputation as a feminist.

When in 2018 Trudeau insisted on "peoplekind" instead of the perfectly good word "mankind," some might have suspected that this former drama teacher was gilding his commitment to feminism just a little. Those suspicions would have been reinforced when the federal government inserted over 200

pages of gender equality statements, gender and diversity statements, and “gender-based analysis-plus” into each of its last two budget documents. Even the most committed feminists might concede that having more than 200 pages of this stuff in the budget every year was overdoing it.

On top of these well-founded suspicions of embellishment, Trudeau’s mismanagement of his gender-balanced cabinet has been inconsistent with the feminist principles he projects. In 2019, after two capable female cabinet ministers, Jody Wilson-Raybould and Jane Philpott, resigned from cabinet in a scandal of Trudeau’s making, he tossed them both out of the Liberal caucus. His reputation for running a feminist government was not improved when last week, one of his underperforming ministers, Maryam Monsef of the gender equality portfolio, referred to the Taliban as “our brothers.” The Taliban is not well known for promoting women’s rights.

Trudeau’s image as a climate saint has also deteriorated in the past six years. From the first days of his government there has been a consistent misalignment between the government’s extravagance and its lectures about how ordinary people must live more austere in order to save the planet. In 2015, for example, Canada sent 383 people jetting across the ocean to the UN climate conference in Paris. It was a great display of climate commitment, but far less carbon-efficient than the United States and United Kingdom, which combined sent only 244 people to Paris despite having around 13 times the GDP of Canada.

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As it does on climate change, the federal government also makes grand gestures on Indigenous issues. There has been a significant increase in federal spending on Indigenous programs and an even greater increase in federal government pronouncements as to whose unceded land everybody is supposedly occupying. But the Indigenous population continues to lack economic opportunity relative to other Canadians, and boil-water advisories on reserves persist.

Canadians are usually tolerant of politicians’ incompetence, hypocrisy, and mumbo-jumbo, but the past 18 months have been trying for everyone, and significant government failures have left people’s impatience more inflamed than usual. As a result, many Canadians find themselves increasingly irritated by the woke emperor’s absence of clothing.

Matthew Lau is a Toronto writer.



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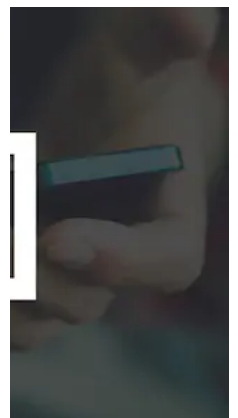
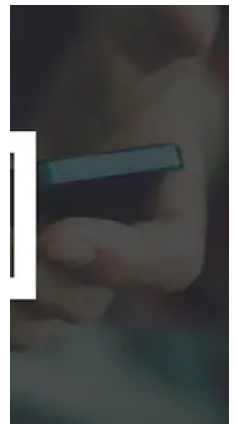
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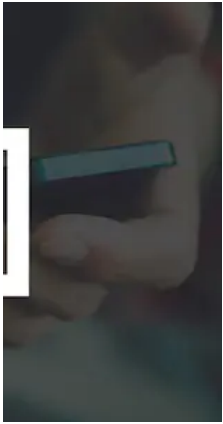
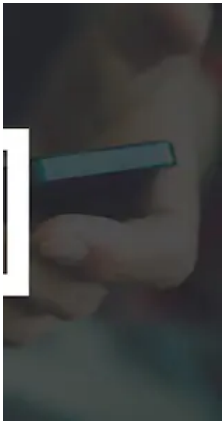
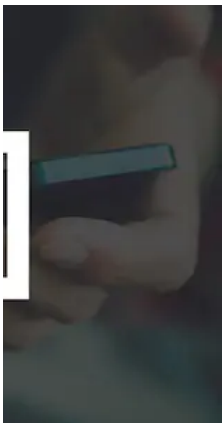
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